operative Learning.

Ali Institute
We had also planned to invite a lecturer from Ali Institute in Lahore for the May seminar but failed to reach an agreement concerning the fee for their participation.

4. A PAUSE FOR REVIEW - LESSONS LEARNT

We have now reached halfway through the course for the school consultants and it may be appropriate to look back, review successes and failures, what have we learnt and how to improve.

It was a new experience
Never before had any similar activity taken place within SCA; one can say that ETSU has been a pioneer by initiating this course. (The course has also received quite a lot of attention, not only from other SCA units but also from other agencies working in Afghanistan). We had the outlines when we started, but we have had to take one step at a time to gradually fill in the contours. Gradually, the aim and the needs have become clearer. By now we feel quite confident that we are on the right track and that the course corresponds with real needs. No doubt, it is very appreciated by the participants.

We did not have the time
When looking back, the immediate reflection is that we were not fully aware of the huge work we initiated on top of all other tasks we had at ETSU. To find material, to elaborate material, to prepare lectures and lessons and not least, the time-consuming translations required lots of time we didn't have and consequently had to do as over time work. Organising seminars and workshops, reading and assessing the essays and "research" reports also required translations and time. Particularly the first seminar was indeed an exhausting experience.

The initiated co-operation with other institutions did not only improve the quality of the second seminar but alleviated also my as well as ETSU's situation.

By recruiting a permanent translator at ETSU one heavy burden was unloaded. As the translator also is experienced in education matters the quality of the translations no longer has to be checked and corrected. The fact that I from July 1999 has the responsibility for the distance course as a consultant and not as advisor of the whole education programme has considerably changed the situation and allows for more reasonable working conditions. Via e-mail the translator receives reading and "research" material for delivery to the distance course participants and by the same media he sends translated essays and reports to me for assessment.

That Amir Mohammad, who all the time has been my main colleague in the work with the

distance course presently is studying in Sweden allows for a continuous co-operation with regards to the planning of future seminars and workshops as well as assessment of essays and reports. In fact, this co-operation provides opportunity for Amir Mohammad to practise what he presently is learning in his studies (Master studies at the Institute of International Education at Stockholm University).

Is the content relevant?

We find the objective and the outputs elaborated in the beginning still of high relevance. The four blocks and the red thread that is running through the course are indeed valid. Of course, as the selected topics cover vast areas only a general overview is possible to achieve. However, also this shallow knowledge and experience has great value not least as different views and different angles are presented which stimulates *thinking* activities, which might be the most durable and most valuable effect of this course.

Initially, we tried to find out what needs for training the school consultants experienced but didn't get any answer. By now, with increasing experience we might get another response and such inquiry will also be done within short.

Is the methodology appropriate?

That education research from the last decades is mainly Western cannot be overlooked. Literature is in English and research findings are often marked by Western attitudes. The initial suspicions or reluctance I met have been replaced by great enthusiasm. At all seminars and workshops and for all essays and field "research" topics we try to emphasise the Afghan context and discuss whether applications are possible in Afghan schools.

The *seminars* have includes lectures of 3-4 hours every day, almost always translated. This is of course a tiring procedure and not the best pedagogy. Questions, comments, thinking pauses, pair discussions and other measures have been included to alleviate the situation. The participants have been engaged in group work as home work and some groups have reported in the following morning. (According to my point of view there is generally inflation with regards to group work in seminars and courses. Group work is valuable when the members have *shared* a reading or other experience and a group discussion can by the different member contributions increase the group's total experience. Or group work can be valuable when the group is to *produce* something, a lesson plan e.g.)

The methodology of the seminars is not satisfactory but considering the big group, the vast topic and the limited time we cannot see any other way. The second seminar was better; we had all gained experience, the lectures were shorter, interrupted more frequently and several lecturers were involved. Other activities were included such as the Starter, that initiates every day of the seminars and for which the participants are responsible. This, as well as well as the Reflective Journal Sharing that followed suit have become very appreciated parts.

As the *workshops* include only 7 – 16 participants and the workshops have another aim the situation has been quite different. Discussions and reasoning have been the main methodology, translation is not necessary all the time and all participants have been involved actively.

The voluntary distance course

When introduced, it was made very clear that participation in the distance course required a lot of extra work that has to be done as extra work, outside office hours and that it may in no way affect the ordinary work as school consultant. It was also clarified that no benefits could be expected from participation. 30 people volunteered; more than we had expected and no one has so far dropped out.

However, as some tasks are done in schools and as the participants leave their duties for the workshops the conditions have not been possible to upheld completely. Travelling to workshops has also cost time. It is of utmost importance to avoid any division or split among the school consultants as a group. Therefore, we have encouraged the distance course participants to share their experience and that other school consultants also should read the provided material.

Initially, we planned to involve also participants from other NGOs but did not find it possible, due to time and capacity constraint. And indeed, it had been impossible considering the work load this course has implied with the SCA school consultants alone.

The logistics have presented some problems, particularly in the beginning. The school consultants did not receive their material in time and did not send their essays and reports to us before the workshops. Assessment of the essays and reports was done too quickly and too superficially in the beginning; only for the last workshop it was done properly. With this new organisation (when I work as consultant instead of education programme advisor) it will be possible to further improve this part.

The quality of the produced essays and the reports is very varied but generally the essays have continuously improved. The reports for which objectives, methods, results, interpretation and evaluation should be elaborated have still not met the requirements. Generally, the last part is missing; it has obviously been very difficult to interpret what is found and evaluate the results. It is hoped, however, that improvements will come, as report writing his was a main topic at the last workshop.

Is the level too high?

One might ask if the topics for the seminars, the texts and the tasks for the distance course are too difficult, whether the course is too demanding. To some extent I would agree. The material *is* advanced, in fact on international university level; neither are the tasks for essay writing and the report writing easy. Even if *all* school consultants do not benefit from *all* things in this course I still believe that the literature, the field studies and the *reflective discussions* are of use for everyone. That some people learn quicker, that some develop more rapidly is a fact in all courses; what is important is that they are encouraged to assist and help the others to follow suit. That is one reason for that presently group reports are required from the "research". The more advanced learners may take a leading role in developing the education programme in the future, in the first hand the teacher training programme.

Why and how reflective thinking?
Throughout the course we try to stimulate reflection. By reflecting on what is observed, by reflecting on what is done, by reflecting on gained experience one can learn from experience. Such qualities are necessary if teaching should develop. How can such competency be trained?

Typically, during the last workshop I asked some hundred times: Why? How? What do you mean? How come? People had to argue for their opinions, something not everybody was used to. The objective with the "research" tasks is not in the first hand to train researchers; rather it is train the capacity to reflect. Also, the tasks for essay writing usually involve comparing and contrasting, finding pros and cons or advantages and disadvantages in order to develop a reflective thinking.

The Reflective Journal writing and sharing is another example. At each seminar and workshop the participants daily write some reflections about the day. They have elaborated their ideas around 6 questions:

What new things did I learn today?
What did I like? Why?
What did I not like? Why?
Was it of any use? How?
Constraints I may face in using it?
Suggestions to overcome these constraints?

The following day some participants share their writing and receive criticism from the others, not on the content itself but whether the reflection includes arguing and reasoning.

The capacity to write reflectively has improved considerably and is very appreciated. It is also regarded as in complete accordance to Islamic values.

Karlstad University contribution
The initial support from Arnquist/Fjällsby when the outlines of the course was elaborated was very valuable and gave us confidence to start. To maintain contact by e-mail has periodically proven difficult. For them in particular but also for us the distance course was just one of many tasks and to sporadically be asked for advice and support can't have been easy. The ideas and suggestions we got were however, mostly very useful and the contribution at the last seminar very valuable.

The co-operation with Karlstad University did not only aim at getting support for the present course but also to maintain contacts for a possible expanding co-operation in the future as outlined already in the Discussion Paper of 1997. For such future co-operation where Karlstad University may take the main responsibility for the training it is seen as desirable that they gradually get involved and get to know the Afghan context.
Whatever happens it is now of importance to widen the contacts with Karlstad University. A meeting is planned to outline a new agreement for the rest of the course; the same kind of support as previously is already agreed upon verbally. As the course now is heading towards teaching and teacher training programme people with experience in this area

would be beneficial to include in the co-operation. At this meeting, a possible future co-operation should also be raised – without any definite assignments of course.

How much does it cost?
Finally, it is suitable to say something about the costs for this training of the fifty SCA school consultants. Including everything, i.e. material, translations, teachers, lodging, travel, per diem, seminar halls etc. the total cost for this course is less than SEK 7000 per school consultant per year.

5. AND THEN?

I would say that a teacher training programme per definition couldn't be a static thing; on the contrary, a teacher training programme must be dynamic! Therefore, a teacher training requires continuous review and repeated revisions and the teacher educators need to be exposed to new ideas and constant upgrading. It is hoped that this two years course is just the starting point to be succeeded by additional training.

A continuation requires elaborated discussions with all parties concerned. One possible idea to further develop is the one outlined already in 1977. A core group of say, 5-10 people from the distance course participants, should be offered a continuation. The people to be selected should be the ones who have been most committed, who have presented the best results, who have been most active etc. For such training Karlstad University might be the responsible provider and the training should be elaborated as a diploma course and would of course require much more than the present distance course. The studies could be conducted as self-studies and as a distance course The selected school consultants could study on a part-time basis say, 50% and work as master trainers at the teacher training centres the rest of the time. As master trainers they should have the task to upgrade their colleagues and continuously improve the teacher training.

Co-operation with Karlstad University does not in any way exclude co-operation with other institutions. The contacts with the Institute of Education Development of Aga Khan University have been very encouraging and fruitful. Their courses e.g. in education management might be of interest for ETSU staff and/or regional managers.

Many aspects and many problems have to be addressed and discussed. Only the fact that very few school consultants know English may be difficult to trespass. Budget restriction is another; new school consultants have to be recruited to replace the master trainers. But, if we really intend to assist the *development* of education in Afghanistan a continuation of the present course must be seriously considered.


PROPERTY OF
ARIC
Established
1989

TWO YEARS TRAINING COURSE
FOR SCA SCHOOL CONSULTANTS
September 1998 - September 2000

A mid-term review



Pia Karlsson
September 1999

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1. BACKGROUND

The deterioration of the school system
In the sixties and seventies a rapid development of education took place in Afghanistan, especially with regards to primary education. During twenty years (1956 – 1976) the number of students was eightfold with a correspondent increase of number of teachers; also, school buildings were constructed in numerous places. This trend faced an abrupt end with the Soviet invasion and the installed clientele Communist regime. The Communist government replaced the old curriculum that was based on Islam and introduced an politicised and Soviet influenced "modern" curriculum. The popular reaction was strong and people started to withdraw their children from schools. Schools ceased to exist, teachers fled the country or joined the mujaheddin. Many teachers were martyred.

Today, SCA is the main provider of primary education
The war has now been going on for more than twenty years. During this long war – first, against the clientele regime and from 1992, a civil war – the erosion of the education system has continued and in some provinces broken down completely. Today's educational system is almost completely supplied by international NGOs, of which SCA is by far the most important. In fact, SCA support represents 87 % of all external support to primary education.

Most teachers are untrained
Teaching in schools is very traditional, built on rote learning, with very little reflection, dialogue or activity. The texts are read from the books over and over again, or read from the blackboard in chorus. To write is identical with copying. The teaching is overwhelmingly theoretical, few, if any practical exercises exist. Students learn to memorise but do they comprehend?

Teacher training institutions have collapsed
Before war there were some twenty institutions and colleges all over the country where teachers received pre-service training. Since then, training of teachers has virtually ceased to exist. Some institutions have been running for some time with very deficient resources; lack of professional trainers, lack of material and lack of support, technically as well as financially. Today's teachers have not even completed their secondary education in many cases.

Today, SCA is the main provider of teacher training
Training of teachers is presently running as *in-service* courses of various duration and provided by various NGOs, of which SCA is the main actor inside Afghanistan. For many years, SCA has implemented two months courses for teachers with low educational background and shorter courses for headmasters. Since a couple of years, SCA is also running so called in-school courses, courses in the afternoons for all teachers of one school during two weeks.

Teacher training has given but few results

The teacher training programme has never been evaluated or studied in detail; there is however, a general agreement that there is only a small impact of the training. The skills, performance and methodology do not differ much between a trained and an untrained teacher. There are probably many reasons for this situation but one is most likely found in the teacher training programme itself. The SCA teacher training programme has become a routine. The model for training of teachers once learnt at a two months course in Peshawar in the late eighties has become like a template and has changed only marginally.

The school consultants have received very little of upgrading in-service training
A majority of SCA school consultants participated in the training course of two months for teacher educators in 1989 and had since then received some annual weekly courses on different topics. The school consultants, most of whom graduated some 20 years ago from a teacher training institute or university faculty had been quite isolated from pedagogical development and ””research”” for a couple of decades. We reached to the conclusion that if any improvement of teaching and learning in schools is to be expected **upgrading the knowledge and skills of the teacher educators is crucial**.

SCA school consultants are the future teachers at future Institutes of Education?
Upgrading the school consultants will be of benefit not only for today's SCA supported schools; investing in upgrading and retraining of SCA education staff will also have future impact. SCA is at present the main provider of primary school support as well as of teacher training and is likely to play an important role - but hopefully not as dominant a role as today - also in the future. SCA school consultants will most likely play a central role in a future institutionalised teacher education programme. In this longer perspective we found it urgent to initiate a planned, structured and systematic **retraining of SCA school consultants, based on ””research”” on children's learning.**

2. PREPARATIONS

Discussion Paper: Future teacher training in Afghanistan
During the second half of 1997 ETSU continuously but irregularly (due to all other tasks at the unit) discussed the situation and outlined a programme for a two years training course. The training should focus around child psychology and teaching methodology. We planned for a voluntary course with extensive self-studies and minor field "research". Teacher trainers from other NGOs were also to be invited. It was foreseen that ETSU needed assistance and inputs from external sources (Sida, foreign universities and colleges) to be able to carry out this task. Also ETSU staff needed upgrading and training. In the *Discussion Paper* produced by ETSU in December 1997 a continuation of the training was also sketched for a core group (to be identified) of the most qualified and gifted school consultants in co-operation with a Swedish Institution for Education. A third imagined step might be support to establishment of a Teacher Training College in Afghanistan where this additionally trained core group should play a crucial role.

"We don't know what we don't know"

Before planning for a more extensive training we engaged the SCA school consultants in what we can call a needs assessment. We discussed and asked them questions such as: In which areas do you feel a need for more knowledge? What kind of training would you like? What would you like to know more about? The result of this survey did not, however, give much clues. The typical answer was: "We don't know what we don't know".

Study tour to Sweden

Amir Mohammad, Technical Advisor at ETSU and myself went for a study visit to Sweden. Besides visiting schools at different levels we approached four institutions with experience in teacher training in developing countries. With teachers at the Teacher Training Institute in Gothenburg, the Institute of Education in Stockholm, Karlstad University and the Institute of International Education at Stockholm University we discussed our plans and penetrated their interest in co-operation. At a later stage, Karlstad University was selected as partner for several reasons: the interest and attitudes displayed by the people we met, the proficiency in child development and beginners' reading and writing, their experience from education co-operation in India and the fact that one representative was since long member of the SAK Board. In addition, Karlstad had in the sixties been involved in support to teacher training in Kabul.

During the study visit we also visited bookshops and libraries and a lot of books and other material for the course were purchased.

Agreement with Karlstad University

Although written, quite an informal agreement with two representatives (Anders Arnquist and Inga-Lill Fjällsby) from Karlstad University was signed. They agreed to provide us, i.e. me in particular as I was – and still am - the main responsible for the training with backup support through e-mail. They accepted to give advice on literature and course material, to suggest tasks for the participants and in general give their opinions whenever asked. During two days in June 1998 we met and elaborated a plan for the two years course as well as the main contents of the first seminar.

3. THE COURSE

A project for two years

The course was planned as a project with objectives, outputs, activities and budget (at a

later stage) elaborated as follows:

Immediate objective: To develop a new teacher education programme based on pedagogical knowledge on children's learning.

Outputs: Improved understanding and knowledge about child development.
Improved understanding and knowledge about teaching and learning processes.
Improved competence in planning, implementing and evaluating a teacher education programme.
Improved capacity for reflective, critical and analytical thinking.

Activities: Four seminars in Peshawar, three workshops at each regional office, self-studies (reading and essay-writings) and minor field "research" with report-writings (detailed description below).

Four main topics

The course consists of four main blocks or topics. For each seminar there is one topic in focus; the topics are selected in a certain sequence with the intention to construct the base for evaluating and improving the present teacher training programme. The final aim is as mentioned to develop at least the outlines of a new teacher training programme. The four topics are:

1. *Child development 0-12 years – social, emotional, motor, linguistic and cognitive development*
2. *Learning components and processes – perception, categorisation, attention, concentration, memory, intelligence, higher order thinking, motivation; beginning reading, reading comprehension, reading and writing; basic competencies in mathematics, co-operative learning.*
3. *Teaching processes and models – design and management of classroom instruction; assessing learning and evaluating education (not yet planned in detail)*
4. *Teacher training programme – review and revision of SCA teacher training programmes.*

Consequently, when a foundation of knowledge of child development in general and from many different aspects is created we move on to study how and why do children learn. Components that affect learning and constraints in learning are discussed. From these steps we will further narrow in to the topic of teaching processes. We will discuss models of teaching and on which theories they rely. We will go on to discuss how to teach children *in the Afghan context* based on deepened knowledge about children's development and children's learning. With this knowledge and experience and by studying various teacher training programmes we should be prepared to evaluate the present SCA teacher training programme and introduce improvements.

We introduce different theories and different research

However, not for any topic or part of a topic there is one single truth presented. Intentionally, we strive at introducing several educational theories and philosophies on whatever subject discussed. Various research findings and results and researchers from different schools are introduced. The emphasis is on research and literature from the last decades, i.e. the seventies, eighties and nineties. The aim is to analyse and scrutinise various results and ideas and discuss possible applications in Afghanistan.

All school consultants meet at four seminars

The first two seminars have now been conducted, in September 1998 and in May 1999. All 50 SCA school consultants have participated, including 4 female at the second seminar. The third seminar will take place in January 2000 and the fourth in September 2000. With such a big group and with such vast subject areas the main methodology of the seminars has been lecturing. Shorter group works and pair works have also been included, especially as homework in afternoon time. At the first seminar I was responsible for almost all the lectures myself, but at the second seminar we had invited two persons from the Institute of Educational Development, Aga Khan University and two lecturers from Karlstad University.

The voluntary distance course is part of the two years course

At the first seminar the distance course was presented and the school consultants were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. To participate implies a great deal of extra work; however, benefits can be expected neither now nor in the future (except the pleasure of gaining more knowledge!) and the studies may not in any way affect the ordinary tasks as school consultant.

30 school consultants opted for the distance course. To participate includes reading of some 30-40 pages per month and writing an essay on a given topic for each chapter. Moreover, it includes minor field ”research”, interviews, studies and/or observations; totally eight studies will be conducted during the course. The distance course also includes workshops at the regional offices. Each group of school consultants is required to participate for feedback on their essays and ”research” reports and to be introduced to readings and ”research” for the coming period. There is one workshop at each regional office between each seminar.

Readings and essay-writings

The book chosen for the first reading was *David Wood: How Children Think and Learn*, a book presently used at many teacher training institutes around the world. The author presents various educational psychologists and their ideas and discusses various research in the education area regarding children’s thinking and learning, often with emphasis on language and communication. Topics for the essays have intentionally been selected in order to promote reflection and analyses and we have tried to avoid tasks that require simple reporting, “rote” topics. Example of assignment topics:

> *Discuss and give concrete examples of how adults in interaction with children can*

develop and stimulate the child's communication skills
Discuss whether Bernstein's elaborated and restricted codes are applicable in Afghanistan.
Reflect on the difficulties in children's math learning in relation to their language development
Etc.

For the next period the reading is focused on learning and teaching beginning reading, reading comprehension, reading and writing and math learning and teaching. The texts are selected and compiled from various sources and as before present various theories. However, the texts from now on include to an increasing degree of ideas and methods on how to *teach* children in school and the essay tasks focus on applications in the Afghan context. Examples of assignments:

Discuss possibilities and constraints to use the interactive theory and the whole language theory in teaching reading in Afghan schools
Elaborate a plan for introducing the teaching of writing compositions in Afghan primary schools.
Etc

Research
For the "research" we have tried to apply a scientific approach. For each study, six studies up till now, the participants have written a report that must include *objective – methods – results –evaluation – conclusive summary.* Each "research" topic is compared with or related to something; some examples:

A study of children's conservation abilities compared to Piaget's test results.
A study of students' self-concept related to teachers' assessment of student abilities.
A study of teacher questioning modes related to teachers' educational background and teacher training.
Etc.

Topics, tables and instructions have been elaborated, translated and explained to the participants at the workshops.

Workshops
Between the seminars workshops for the distance course participants are conducted. The aim is to give feedback on produced essays and "research" reports and to introduce new readings and "research". The school consultants are working in three different regions and the workshops are conducted for the three groups separately, with 7-12 participants in each. So far two workshops have been conducted, in January 1999 and in August 1999. The readings, the essay writings and the "research" follow the same trend as described for the seminars. The first studies focused on child development in general and on language development in particular. Later we turned into the classrooms and studied teacher behaviour and influence, student thinking (in math) and students' ideas of themselves (self-

concept), mathematics and language development, constraints in learning, etc. We have now reached the next stage and focus more on school and school subjects; presently the studies and reading concentrate on beginning reading and reading comprehension and observation of teacher questioning techniques.

The reflective practitioner
From the very beginning we found it of great importance to stimulate and promote a critical and *reflective* thinking. To reflect on practise - e.g. posing questions such as what am I doing and why, are my objectives useful and worthwhile, did I achieve what I aimed at, how to change and improve – is essential for any professional and is included in most professional training of whatever kind nowadays (See e.g. David Schoen: The Reflective Practitioner). It is necessary not least for teacher educators who, among other things must have the capacity to critically observe and analyse what they observe in the classrooms.

In order to promote a reflective thinking we have tried as mentioned to introduce and discuss various research findings and various ideas during the seminars. Also, when reading and writing the participants have been encouraged to critically analyse what they read and to view things from different angles. Not least have the provided "research" tasks aimed at training the participants to critically observe and analyse what they study.

Translations
Very few school consultants know English and consequently, it is necessary to translate all reading materials. External consultants have been engaged in this work but the translations had to be corrected afterwards by ETSU (Amir Mohammad). The reading guidelines and the material for the research have been translated directly at ETSU. The essays and the research reports are sent from the regions to ETSU and verbally translated to me by Amir Mohammad.

Also at the seminars and workshops translations are necessary. To facilitate for ETSU staff to translate all lectures have been prepared in detail, and read in advance by the translator. For the workshops it has been possible to co-operate more with regards to planning and implementation and translations have been reduced.

Co-operation
Karlstad
Besides assisting initially with the outlines of the two years course Anders Arnquist and Inga-Lill Fjällsby from Karlstad University have provided us with suggestions for the essay topics and ideas for field "research". During three days at the seminar in May 1999 they lectured on Children Learning Reading and Writing.

Aga Khan University
The Institute of Educational Development of Aga Khan University in Karachi provided us with advice and material when we visited them in January 1999. Two teachers from the Institute participated one day during the May seminar and shared their experience of Co-

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